

## **Proposed Parks budget keeps community centers open and serving the public**

Mayor Mike McGinn and City Councilmember Sally Bagshaw are endorsing a staffing model for Seattle Parks and Recreation community centers that keeps them open and professionally staffed. The proposal will be included in the proposed 2012 City budget.

In this economic climate where cities are closing community centers and parks agencies are looking for alternatives, Denver has adopted a varied service level system, Portland operates only 12 centers, and in San Jose, 17 of 56 centers are now operated by outside groups. Bob Johnson, Board Chair of the National Recreation and Park Association, recently said “Beyond the basic question of how to procure funds . . . is an even bigger issue of how to understand and adapt to a changing business model, how to find the public-private partnerships that work best for a particular community, and how to seize the opportunities for innovation that come along with widespread funding challenges.”

In response to the continuing need for budget reductions and direction from the City Council, Parks staff conducted an inclusive, data-driven analysis and process to examine alternative models for staffing and operating the centers. Parks worked with a committee of citizens, including teens and seniors, City Council staff, City Budget Office staff, labor unions, representatives of the Associated Recreation Council (ARC), and members of the Park Board to analyze data, hold public meetings, conduct a public survey, and design the alternatives from which the recommended model was chosen. Working without the time pressures of the budget process, this process led to a model that the committee believes will increase efficiency and direct service to the public. The work of the committee was an exemplary collaboration among citizens, unions, Parks’ nonprofit partner ARC, and staff from the agencies mentioned above.

The proposal saves \$1.23 million, of which \$784,000 is achieved through budget reductions and \$446,000 comes to Parks from its nonprofit partner the Associated Recreation Council that would partially cover community center expenses: <http://www.arcseattle.org/>. Staff reductions would total 13.63 full-time positions and would reduce the hours of 75 people.

The preferred operating model would comprise five geographically-based service areas, each with five community centers staffed by a team. Within each area the centers would provide varying levels of service, and each team would be led by a Senior Recreation Coordinator. Given the continuing financial issues facing the City, the alternative is to reduce hours and staffing at all centers to achieve budget savings. The preferred operating model preserves services to the greatest extent possible by keeping the centers open with varying levels of service.

The Senior Recreation Coordinator for each service area would supervise a team of recreation professionals (and custodial staffing) assigned to individual sites, who can respond quickly and nimbly to changing circumstances and provide consistency within the service area. The staff would work with the people in the community to establish operating hours and decide on programming, and will try to avoid duplication of programs within the service area. For example, within a geographic service area, one center may open early while another stays open late; one may specialize in sports and another in the arts.

Today a standard community center is open to the public for general use 53 hours per week during the school year and 46 hours per week in the summer, for an average of slightly more than 50 hours per week. The following chart shows current and proposed staffing levels:

<u>Scenario</u>	<u>Coordinator</u>	<u>Asst. Coord.</u>	<u>Rec. Leader</u>	<u>Rec. Attendant</u>	<u>Laborer</u>	<u>Total</u>
Today	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	5.0
Svc Level 1	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.5	1.0	4.5
Svc Level 2a	1.0	0.0	.75	.75	1.0	3.5
Svc Level 2b.	.50	0.0	.50	.50	.50	2.0

A service level 1 center would be open for general use 70 hours per week, A service level 2a center 45 hours, and a service level 2b center 25 hours.

The level of service for each center is determined by a set of criteria that include the condition of the building and the costs of maintaining it, past use of the building for drop-in use, paid use, and rentals, and the number of patrons served by scholarships. The Working Group assigned point values to each Community Center on each criterion based on its performance relative to each of the other 24 Community Centers. Points were assigned by a formula, which allocated the maximum point value to the highest-performing community center and zero points to the lowest-performing community center, in each of the nine criteria. Those in between received points proportional to their rankings. Then point totals within the service area and consideration of potential economic justice impacts determined the service level of each center.

Service level 1 centers maintain or increase the hours they are open to the public for general use (50 to 70), and service level 2 centers decrease these hours (15 to 45).

ARC will continue to provide child care and registered programming outside of the hours when a center is open for general public use.

For more information on the proposal, please go to <http://seattle.gov/parks/centers/operations.htm>.

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